

In Support of Committee Bill 5154 - **AN ACT CONCERNING MENTAL HEALTH CARE AND WELLNESS TRAINING AND SUICIDE PREVENTION FOR POLICE OFFICERS.**

March 7, 2019

Dear Members of the Public Safety and Security:

***"Paul hurt himself",*** they said. ***"Your husband has sustained a non-survivable self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head."*** I can still hear those words from that tragic day – March 12, 2013. Suicide – such a terrible, ugly, taboo word.

I am the widow of East Hartford Police Officer Paul Buchanan Badge #208. Paul was a police officer who served the East Hartford Community for almost 24 years with pride, honor and integrity. He was East Hartford's Police officer of the Year in 2008 and a decorated officer and a friend to all. Paul and I were married for almost 29 years; we have two amazing sons, Jared and Benjamin. Sadly, Paul was diagnosed with job-related PTSD/Panic Disorder/Depression/Anxiety. In his final written words to me and my boys, Paul wrote *"...make my death an issue and get help for others that are like me."*

Since his passing, it has been my mission to fulfill his wish. In 2014, together with the Connecticut Alliance to Benefit Law Enforcement (CABLE), the *"Believe 208"* mission was born. The *"Believe 208"* mission is to increase awareness of the unique challenges facing first responders and to be a trusted, influential source for first responders, their families, agencies and community stakeholders.

**As you may already know, these past several years has been devastating for police suicides in Connecticut. Did you know that we lost a Bridgeport Police Officer to suicide just last week?! And we lost five officers in a span of four months in 2017?! Now, more than ever, our local law enforcement officers and first responders who give so much to our community need our support and services. I am personally reaching out to you to urge your support of this bill to help our police officers with legal protections and mental health services by removing penalties for any police officer who seeks mental health assistance in the State and allows for the return of a police officer's firearm after his or her release from a voluntary admission for psychiatric care. Please pass this bill to help our officers who suffer from job-related trauma and mental health impairments. Can you imagine being subjected to horrific incidents on a daily basis, being the first on the scene whether for gruesome murders, suicides, or car accidents? This is all in a day's work for our police officers. There's a limit to how much tragedy they can take. How can we send them into harm's way and not support them?**

East Hartford Officer Paul Buchanan and those officers lost in Danbury, Milford, Westport, Bethel, Bridgeport, New Haven, Naugatuck, Vernon, Glastonbury, Groton...it's too late for them. NOW is the time to change the laws and break the resistance that is presently in place for our officers to reach out for help. Please pass Bill 5154 and let's find a way to work together to bring officer mental health and wellness and suicide prevention to the forefront.

***"Alone I can do so little, together we can do so much."***

Thank you for ***"Believing"***.

Sincerely,

Trish Buchanan, 15 Sanford Ridge, East Granby, CT 06026